

# A Probe into the Implication of Education with Zhang Junmai's Philosophy of Mind

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**Abstract:** In modern times, under the dual crisis of nationality and culture, Zhang Junmai returned to the internal philosophy of "Inner Sage," whereby he started the global exploration of "Outer King" and constructed his own categorized Neo-Confucianism thoughts based on the contents of Yangming's philosophy of mind as well as western philosophies. Therefore, by probing into the foundation of Zhang Junmai's philosophy of mind, this paper explores the educational significance of the view of life based on honesty, the methodology of giving equal importance to learning and doing, and the world's point of view contained in it, which may serve as a certain reference for the current education development.

**Keywords:** Zhang Junmai; Philosophy of mind nature; Educational contents

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## 1 Introduction

The fundamentals of Zhang Junmai's Neo-Confucianism ideological system are influenced by Yangming's philosophy of mind based on Song-Ming Confucianism that explores its nature. In the view of Wang Yangming, "The pattern of unity is the essence of nature in terms of the conscience of the mind, whereby its' condensed master is the mind."<sup>[1]</sup> The "nature" and "mind" are the contents of metaphysics and physics, that is the theory of "mind is principle," "conscience" and "unity of knowledge and action." It was under the fundamentals of cultural crisis that Zhang Junmai began to realize the important value of education and explored it.

## 2 Lack of Research on Educational Implication in Zhang Junmai's Philosophy of Mind

Firstly, Zhang Junmai's Neo-Confucianism thought is systematic, and his huge Neo-Confucianism thought system can be summarized in two to three levels. Most of the previous studies

were amplified from a single aspect of life and political philosophy due to the lack of literatures on the revitalization of the education system in physics as well as the research literatures on Neo-Confucianism thought system. Secondly, there are few contents that need to be explored from the source of Yangming's philosophy of mind, which are the foundation of Zhang Junmai's philosophy of mind. Previous research works mainly focused on Wang Yangming's work. There is insufficient research on the internal relationship between the connotation of his study on Neo-Confucianism and Yangming's philosophy of mind in the re-explanation of Yangming's philosophy of mind in the 16<sup>th</sup> century of China's Idealism Philosophy and the establishment of the system of "New Mind" under the influence of traditional philosophy of mind by Zhang Junmai's Neo-Confucianism. Thirdly, previous studies only focused on the clarification of Confucianism in Song-Ming Dynasties in Zhang Junmai's Neo-Confucianism thought without in-depth discussion of its educational implication, resulting in insufficient

research on the educational significance of the philosophy of mind nature itself.

### **3 Educational Value of Zhang Junmai's Philosophy of Mind**

#### **3.1 "Mind is Reason:" theoretical foundation of free will philosophy of life**

In Wang Yangming's opinion, "Mind is the reason. If the mind is not covered by selfish desires, it is the way to heaven. Thus, there is no need to add external factors."<sup>[2]</sup> The "mind" is the fundamental of the universe and the reason why people can think and act is driven by the "mind." The assumed "reason" is a natural and social phenomenon of the norms. In Zhang Junmai's opinion, "mind is reason" is reflected in the "debate on science and view on life." The meaning of view on life is explained by Zhang Junmai and Liang Shuming who advocated that the study of free will on life should be emphasized on science in order to fight against the school of science represented by Ding Wenjiang and Hu Shi. Therefore, this cultural debate is essentially a struggle between the western culture and our traditional culture. Moreover, after learning western philosophies and witnessing the cruelty of western wars, Zhang Junmai summarized the characteristics of his view on life and science, "View on life is subjective, intuitive, comprehensive, free will and unitary; Science is objective, reasoning, analysis, causality and similarity."<sup>[3]</sup> Therefore, in his opinion, scientific development is both an opportunity and a challenge while promoting social progress and it will also lead to "spiritual vacuum" in people. Thus, our country should re-examine the relationship between science and views on life, advocate the development of the free will philosophy of life, pay more attention to the shaping of ideological power and the development of morality and spirituality, as well as avoid walking on the old path which leads to outbreaks of cruel wars and spiritual emptiness just like in the western world.

#### **3.2 "Conscience:" the embodiment of democratic and liberal political philosophy**

As an "educator of national liberation," Zhang Junmai found that the disease lies not in the body, but in the heart, which is the root of a human being. Therefore, saving the country is to save the hearts of the people so that people adhere to their own moral conscience. Zhang believed that "If the people of the whole country rebuild their national patriotism and self-confidence, and realize the unity of knowledge, emotion and will-power, then the reason to grow the country will come naturally."<sup>[4]</sup> Firstly, in the aspect of national views, Zhang Junmai believed that "the reason people are thinking is what makes a nation."<sup>[5]</sup> Furthermore, "thinking" means the power and perception to think while interpreting and thinking with the heart. Therefore, Zhang Junmai paid special attention to the development of people's mentality and the shaping of people's ideological power. Secondly, in terms of national will, "freedom" is politically embodied in the political program of "modified democracy" and economically embodied in the economic system of "national socialism." According to Zhang Junmai, "freedom in the philosophical sense is a natural attribute of human spirit, as well as a conscious and automatic ability to know. The people with such freedom are the choice and creator of the constitutional, legal, academic, and cultural institutions in all their aspects."<sup>[3]</sup> "Freedom of will" often contains the ontological freedom of the mind and the independence of moral conscience, which is consistent with the concept of "spiritual power" proposed by him in the debate on science and mystery. Finally, in terms of national confidence, the modern national crisis directly lead to the emergence of cultural crisis, whereby the collision between the Chinese and western cultures led to the decline of our national cultural confidence. Thus, the emergence of the "morbid psychology" of following the Western culture. In this context, Zhang Junmai was shouldering the great ambition of "saving the country through education," which turned into the exploration of the cultural road, whereby he tried to rebuild self-confidence through

the revival of traditional culture and make people believe in their own national culture from the bottom of their hearts.

### **3.3 “The unity of knowing and doing:” the exploration of the cultural view of spiritual freedom**

The theory of “unity of knowledge and action” is a practical explanation of Yangming’s theory of mind from metaphysics to physics. It is a reflection and innovation to avoid the biased development of “knowledge” and “action” after inheriting the thought of “knowledge” and “action” of predecessors. Just as Wang Yangming said, “to be aware of what you are doing is to know the real, and true knowledge is action.”<sup>[6]</sup> On the contrary, Zhang Junmai was thinking about what kind of education could meet the urgent need of modernization development. He intended to revive the traditional education system and put it into practice, eventually, establishing Xuehai Academy and ethnic culture academy. In his own point of view, the revival of college education did not restore ancient ways but innovated a new system of education which is a good traditional culture. At the same time, it is necessary to pay attention to learning western knowledge for information, train talents with political consciousness, and realize the goal of the revitalization of national culture. Therefore, Zhang Junmai proposed “virtue and wisdom to go hand in hand with sincerity and brightness.” At the same time, the academy implements learning, thinking, and acting as the order of learning, self-improvement, talent, patriotic and moral principles, loyalty, faithfulness, and self-development which hold the significance of “the unity of knowledge and action.”

## **4 An Exploration of the Connotation of Contemporary Sex Education in Zhang Junmai’s Philosophy**

### **4.1 Honesty-based on view of life**

In fact, as the first generation of Neo-Confucian scholars, Zhang Junmai like other Neo-Confucian scholars focused on the construction of ontology

after realizing the solidification of the human mind. Just as he said, “The coexistence of mind and matter must be followed by the theory that mind and matter are controlled by force. Then the interaction of mind and matter is the key to opening and closing the universe, whereas the pivot of change is rise and fall.”<sup>[7]</sup> Through the establishment of a “free” view of life, it tries to arouse people’s inner and spiritual freedom again and create a “deathless heart.” At the same time, Zhang also recognized “human” as the center of education, and in his philosophy of life, he paid attention to the development of human’s inner spirit and free will; also, in his political philosophy, he paid attention to the development of “human” political consciousness and in the cultural renaissance, he paid attention to the shaping of talents national confidence. As a result, it can be seen that “human” is the fundamental education of philosophy of mind nature. Finally, Zhang Junmai established the concept of honesty based on the inherited traditional Confucian culture – “Honesty is the way of heaven. Honesty is the way of people.”<sup>[8]</sup>

### **4.2 Perspective on the method of paying equal attention to learning and doing**

The methodology of Zhang Junmai’s philosophy of mind is to attach equal importance to learning and doing. Firstly, the level of “learning” can be understood as to learn, but its content is not limited to intellectual knowledge and more importantly, the development of moral character. Secondly, there is the “line” level which should be understood as action. After comparing Chinese and western cultures, Zhang Junmai found that Chinese traditions have always attached importance to learning while neglecting the practical aspects. Therefore, Zhang Junmai vigorously promoted the method of combining learning and action in the academy, thus advocating the integration of the Western knowledge and China’s virtue in the aspect of knowledge sharing and receiving, and the integration of China’s learning with Western “action” in the practical aspects. Finally, the level of learning to pay equal attention is shown in the

theory of “the unity of,” whereby its original intention is based on the inherent morality ontology that pushes for external work, stems from the heart of ontology to morality development, and finally changes the heart in order to realize the conscience and the harmonious development of the inner and outer behavior.

### 4.3 Perspective on the world’s views

As the goal of Chinese traditional Confucian culture, “great harmony” is the ultimate pursuit of a better world. Zhang hopes the younger generation will carry forward the traditional culture. It can be said that it is to “carry forward the past” on one hand and “open the future” on the other hand, showing a general view of universal unity.<sup>[3]</sup> Around the 1920s, the outbreak of the World War and the emergence of the “scientific and metaphysical debate” in the domestic academic circle made Zhang clearly realize that western cultures should be learned. Instead of mechanically applying western cultures, an education system suited to the national conditions should be created. He realized the problems of education when he was thinking about the slow development phase that China was in, then, he emphasized philosophy on the foundation of all academic studies. In terms of the principles of learning, four other principles are put forward: “erudite,” “careful thinking and discernment,” “knowledgeable with wisdom” and “deliberate consideration.” It is worth noting that although these four principles are expressed in traditional ways in China, their connotations have been enriched. They were formed by Zhang Junmai based on the combination of ancient and modern cultures as well as Chinese and Western cultures.

### 5 Conclusion

In summary, a comprehensive view of Yangming’s mind-learning system and Zhang Junmai’s Neo-Confucianism ideological system shows that the theory of “mind is principle” and philosophy of life reveals to each other, while the theory of “promoting conscience” and political philosophy interacts and integrates with each other, and the

theory of “unity of knowledge and action” is closely related to the practice of learning, thinking and cultural revival. However, the postmodernists are worried that the development of the society is all about the pursuit of interests which may lead to the loss of utilitarianism and the meaning of life, resulting in inevitable distortion of people’s life views, methodology and world’s perspective, and eventually, the confusion of the meaning of life. Therefore, the content of the philosophy of mind in Zhang Junmai’s Neo-Confucianism is of great educational significance in enlightening the development of contemporary education and providing a new “good prescription” to solve the dilemma in the modern society.

### Disclosure statement

The author discloses no conflicts of interest.

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